

## PART 9: CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

### 1 Selection of Meeting/Conference Sites

#### A. Most Cost Effective Location

Unless identifiable programmatic considerations dictate otherwise, all conferences, meetings, and seminars shall be held at the most cost-effective location, after considering such cost factors as:

- meals
- lodging
- transportation
- rental of conference rooms

If employees from more than one ODS are to attend the meeting or conference, choose the site which results in the lowest overall cost to the Agency.

#### B. Contact

When planning meetings that involve either numerous attendees or the expenditure of significant Agency resources, contact the Resource Coordination Staff of MSD, at 202-205-7832.

### 2 Required Cost-Benefit Analysis & Office of the Under Secretary Approval

#### A. Cost Benefit Analysis

If a meeting of 7 or more employees requires the payment of transportation expenses, a cost-benefit analysis must be made and kept on file by the approving official. At a minimum, this analysis should contain:

- the name and official duty station of each attendee or group of attendees,
- the estimated total travel costs of each attendee,
- other anticipated expenses, such as: meeting room rental, and
- justification of choosing the selected site over at least three other reasonable sites.

#### B. Office of the Under Secretary Approval

Do not commit to any off-site meetings or conferences for overall management, strategic planning, or reorganization with a total cost exceeding \$25,000, *including travel costs*, without the approval of the immediate Office of the Under Secretary. Proposals for off-site meetings that exceed this threshold should be submitted to the Under Secretary through the Administrator with specific justification for the function, location, expected number of USDA attendees, and an estimate of costs, including travel and per diem costs of USDA attendees.

Refer to Notice AS-1934, dated September 19, 1996, and follow Departmental procedures regarding approval of meetings, conferences, events, and training costing over \$25,000

### **3 Per Diem for Attendance at Conferences**

#### **A. Conference Lodging Allowance**

A conference lodging allowance has been established to allow an agency sponsoring a conference flexibility in negotiating lodging rates at chosen conference locations when it is not possible to obtain lodging facilities within the established lodging portion of the locality per diem rate. It is a pre-determined maximum allowance of up to 25 percent greater (rounded to the next highest dollar) than the applicable locality lodging portion of the per diem rate.

Under this reimbursement method, employees will be reimbursed the actual amount incurred for lodging up to the conference lodging allowance. When conference lodging costs exceed the maximum conference lodging allowance, actual subsistence for lodging should be authorized. The M&IE portion of the locality per diem rate is not affected when either the conference lodging allowance or actual expense for lodging is authorized.

#### **B. Conference Lodging Allowance Subsistence Code**

The subsistence code should be used on travel authorizations when the conference lodging allowance is approved for official travel.

#### **C. Light Refreshments**

Agencies sponsoring a conference may provide light refreshments, at government expense, for Agency employees as long as the majority of the attendees are in travel status. In addition, the Comptroller General has ruled that light refreshments, when authorized, can only be made available to those employees that are **in** TDY travel status and agencies have no authorization to provide light refreshments for employees that are **not in** TDY travel status.

### **4 Award Ceremonies**

The Administrator has the authority to designate the specific award ceremonies for which employees (and one individual related by blood or affinity of the employee's choosing) may be reimbursed for travel expenses. Handicapped employees may be authorized expenses for a special assistant, such as a nurse, seeing-eye dog, etc.